DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 540 CS 213 745

AUTHOR Napier, Minta
TITLE Teachers Making Decisions When We Know the Censors Are Watching.
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (82nd, Louisville, KY, November 18-23, 1992). Presented with Rita Paye and Ellen Brinkley.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Freedom; *Censorship; Christianity; Elementary Secondary Education; English Curriculum; English Instruction; Moral Issues; *Moral Values; *Public Education; *Reading Materials; *Teacher Response
IDENTIFIERS Controversial Materials; *Educational Issues; *Pressure Groups; Religious Fundamentalism

ABSTRACT

Attempts to suppress and even censor various texts used by English teachers often are led by members of fundamentalist Christian groups. These activists charge educators with depreciating Christian moral values and instigating a religion of "secular humanism" in the schools. Various examples of recent legal cases show how prominent the fundamentalist activists are in the text censorship controversy. Censorship cases, though they have tended to be decided in favor of school districts, are disruptive to the schools nonetheless and often are concluded only after numerous appeals. Violence has even erupted in several cases of strong public reaction. Although it has been estimated that fundamentalist and Christian organizations only account for 25% of all cases, much of their effect stems from teachers who do not use certain texts or strategies because they fear public objection or even legal actions against them. The overall agenda of Christian groups dealing with educational issues involves attacks on a wide array of techniques, themes, and topics currently being used or developed. It also appears that many of these groups work interdependently and have devised a sophisticated network to advance their objectives. For teachers to ward off these grassroots attacks, three steps should be taken: (1) contractual agreements should be made giving teachers the right to select and use materials relevant and appropriate to their students; (2) teachers and school boards should write rationales for the classroom materials they select and define methods for handling complaints; and (3) entire communities must keep lines of communication open and remain alert for fundamentalist candidates for school boards. A "Selection Rationale for Classroom Materials" form developed by Ellen Brinkley for teachers and a "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work" form developed for school districts by the National Council of Teachers of English are included. (HB)

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Mini-Workshop speech for NCTE, 1992
Minta Napier
Presented with Rita Paye and Ellen Brinkley

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Teachers Making Decisions When We Know the Censors Are Watching

As we have seen from some of our discussion, people don't always agree on what is good or bad for students. If parents complain about an instructional strategy or a text, they feel they are correct in their beliefs; they believe they are right. The classroom teachers in these situations also feel they are right.

Since the beginning of time we have never been able to agree on what truth is. We continue to have people today who claim to know and to possess the truth. As we have discussed, this group of people includes many fundamentalists who see public education as a secular humanist plot that is meant to depreciate Christian values. These people who claim to know the truth believe that only the truth they know should be taught in schools, anything else is an immoral education.

The fundamentalist groups include many people from tax exempt organizations that claim they do not have an agenda and do not work together. Let us briefly examine some past censorship incidents, who was involved, and the rhetoric used.

In 1974 in the West Virginia's Kanawha County, James Moffett's K-12 Interaction program and other texts met with protest. Mel and Norma Gabler of Longwood, Texas who operate a nonprofit corporation known as

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Educational Research Analysts helped teach the West Virginia protestors how to write textbook objections. The Washington, D. C. based Heritage Foundation, founded by Joseph B. Coors and now headed by William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan, sent legal aid to jailed protestors in West Virginia. The Kanawha protestors, according to Moffett, covertly objected to works by Blacks and Chicanos by overtly objecting to the bad grammar and foul language contained in their literature. In Kanawha County, the fundamentalists called the original members of the school board who approved the books "communists."

Ten years later, in 1984, some parents in Tennessee filed a suit which led to what is commonly referred to as the "Scopes II" trial. The parents who filed the suit asked that their children be given an exemption from exposure to the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston reading series used in their district. The Mozart family along with nine other families objected in part to the magic, witches, and supernatural in Cinderella, King Arthur, and Wizard of Oz. The legal fees of the lawyer who defended the families were paid by the Concerned Women of America.

In 1985, lawyer Michael Farris, the former president of the Moral Majority in the state of Washington, argued that a local school district was inhibiting Cassie Grove's family religion and advancing the religion of secular humanism by including The Learning Tree by Gordon Parks on the high school reading list.

In 1987, Judge William Brevard Hand, an Alabama judge with the lower court, claimed in *Smith vs. Board of School Commissioners* that 44 books should be banned for all students from the Mobile County public schools because they promoted secular religion. In both the Washington and

Alabama cases, educators within the school districts were called secular humanists.

One of the most recent cases is the 1991 *Brown vs. Woodland Joint Unified School District.* This case was brought by parents in a community outside Sacramento, California against the school district for incorporating Harcourt Brace Jovanovich's Impressions series into the reading program. Douglas and Katherine Brown object to offensive titles and exercises. This case as far as I know is yet unresolved. The People for the American Way brought the suit to the NCTE's attention and the NCTE, the National School Boards Association, and the ALA Freedom to Read Foundation have agreed to sign the suit.

These are only some of the more famous trials. Numerous suits similar to these have been filed. Those of you who subscribe to the SLATE newsletter are aware of how frequently NCTE speaks out on these cases.

Legally when a school district's policies are called into question, the final decision usually favors the school district. However, that final decision may occur after several appeals.

In any event there are no clear winners or losers in censorship cases. Such cases frequently are so disruptive to the school districts and communities where they occur that the resumption of business as usual is virtually impossible following a court decision or book dispute. Many censorship debates do not reach final resolution in court, they are hashed out within the community. This was the 1974 case in Kanawha County where the Federal district court ruled the school board did have the authority to determine curricular materials. The judges did not have the final say; however, the more vocal members of the community did. Children were kept home from school, parents who did not keep their children home were

threatened, school bus drivers were forced to suspend service, buses that continued service were shot at, two men were wounded by gunfire, coal miners struck, cars were smashed, public prayer called for the death of the school board members, and two elementary schools and the courthouse were firebombed. Because the court decision was obviously an unacceptable solution to many members of the community, new school board members who were more representative of fundamentalists were elected. The new board called for a review of the books and the books were banned or relegated to back shelves.

In Yucaipa, California a 1990 dispute over the Impressions series involved no court proceedings. Alternative texts were offered to parents who did not want their children reading an Impressions text. But these parents were not pleased with the alternative texts and sought instead a recall election in an attempt to oust two school board members and replace them with candidates they backed. The local group of Yucaipa protestors claimed their actions were independent of any national political group, but they do admit they got information on how to make their voices heard from the Christian Educators Association. During the dispute neighbor children wouldn't play with the children of one teacher, eggs were thrown at her house, and broken glass was thrown on her lawn. Another teacher found a nail in one of her car tires. This same teacher reported that one of the concerned parents paid his child to steal an Impressions textbook and another parent she had talked with surveyed the series and then complained that it didn't have enough patriotism. Another teacher reported that some members of the citizens group, when getting signatures for the recall election, told senior citizens that teachers were teaching Satanism and supported their claim by showing the elderly voters books that were not a

part of the Impressions series. Another teacher reported that she and many of her fellow teachers were told they were not good Christians but were Satanists. The school board recall failed but the teachers in the Yucaipa/ Calimesa district say things will never be the same. Their professional judgement has been questioned; such attacks leave a lasting scar upon teacher efficacy.

People for the American Way, a Washington-based group which monitors censorship cases, estimates 25% of the cases initiated in the United States are brought by local groups that are aligned with Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum or the Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Other active groups involved in recent cases include: the Christian Educators Association, Robert L. Simond's National Association of Christian Educators, Simond's Citizens for Excellence in Education, Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America, Mel and Norma Gabler's Educational Research Analysts, the Traditional Values Coalition, Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the Rutherford Institute, Samuel Blumenfeld's organization, Pat Robertson's National Legal Foundation, and others.

Granted, about 75% of our censorship stems from other factors. This 75% includes many literary censors who would like to supply book lists of what students should and should not read. All of us have probably known librarians or teachers who insisted that only books from their list should be counted for credit. However, an even greater percentage of our censorship stems from teachers who don't use teaching strategies or texts because they fear that someone might object. It is a real fear that teachers feel because many teachers do receive such complaints from parents. Therefore, today I would like to concentrate on the organized groups that have favored censorship. It is often these groups that inspire parents to complain.

Censorship cases are increasing. The People for the American Way recorded 172 attacks in 1989, 244 cases in 1990, and 264 cases in 1991. Furthermore, Edward Jenkinson, author of Censors in the Classroom: The Mind Benders, maintains that only one in fifty censorship incidents are reported. The Association of American Publishers indicates that more than 20 percent of our nation's schools and more than 30 percent of our libraries face censorship controversies in a given year. When explaining why censorship has increased in recent years, Lee Burris and Edward Jenkinson suggest that people examine schools more critically during times of economic, political, or moral stress. In this "Year of the Woman" we heard our "Education President" and "Slick Willie" debate family values and who had the best economic plan for our nation. We have to admit this election year is a time of extreme stress. Stress caused by many factors, not just our waiting for Perot. Not everyone who feels stress is a fundamentalist, but many are persuaded by the fundamentalists. Phyllis Schlafly attended the Republican Convention and we are all aware of Phyllis' definition of "family values." Censors like Phyllis write books, have radio and television shows, have syndicated columns, and speak frequently. They are sometimes seen on C-SPAN talking to members of Congress during breaks; they testify at Congressional hearings and they organize extensive letter writing campaigns. Most importantly, people like Phyllis are willing to come into a community to help local citizens organize for action. Parents want what is best for their children and it is easy to think that the best way to protect children is to place all threats out of their reach.

The groups that advocate censorship maintain that they do not have an agenda. Yet these groups continually oppose secular humanism, occultism, new ageism, creationism, values clarification, invasion of privacy,

globalism, usurping parental authority, negativism, pluralism, realism, progressivism, and more. Robert Marzano, who has studied these groups extensively believes their major targets are: self-esteem programs, cooperative learning, global education, the use of imagery, gifted-education programs, and whole language. Reinventing America's Schools by Kathi Simonds Hudson, Robert Simond's daughter, is critical of: outcome based education, site-based management, multiculturalism, re-learning, year-round schooling, schools as day-care centers, on-campus social services, early intervention, at risk student programs, and more. These groups do more than advocate censorship of specific books; they want to censor instructional strategies and philosophies of learning. This agenda of opposition can be seen if we consider for a moment the statements some of the leaders of these various organizations. The Gablers say: "Religion is back in the classroom in the form of humanism, a religion of supreme idolatry that puts man, not God, at the center of it all." Jerry Falwell says: "We must bring immoral public education to its knees" and he is dedicated to "helping the Moral Majority of America fight obscene school textbooks." Beverly LaHaye says: "Abortion, suicide, euthanasia, gambling, and homosexuality are presented as viable and positive alternative personal choices. Impressionable young minds will readily accept the prevalent secular humanist values and naturally reject the biblical moral standards that are no longer taught." Robert L. Simonds says: ". . .'whole language' definitely created illiteracy. We unwaveringly urge the teaching of reading by 'phonics.' Many schools refuse." Reverend Tim LaHaye, a California minister and a founder of the Moral Majority says: "The public schools have become conduits to the minds of youth, training them to be anti-God, anti-moral, anti-family, anti-free enterprise, and anti-American."

What is the agenda of these fundamentalist groups? James Moffett says that we have a national censorship movement. J. E. Wood suggests that we have attempts to Christianize our schools. Elliot Mincberg of People for the American Way says the groups would like to control and limit public education so that it conforms to their beliefs. Paul Putnam, a human and civil rights specialist for the NEA, believes the groups are attempting to discredit public education in order to privatize the schools. He maintains the likelihood of privatization is greater if public education appears to be failing. These groups do not admit to having an agenda, but many people feel they do, indeed, have an agenda.

These same groups maintain that they do not work together. However, Edward Jenkinson who has followed cases of censorship for many years disagrees. In 1988 he studied an attempt in East Gibson, Indiana to censor Tactics for Thinking, a thinking skills program authored by Robert Marzano and Daisy Arrendo. Jenkinson studied the strategies being used against Tactics for Thinking in this small community and concluded that the methodologies were similar to those used against secular humanism. He also tied some of the protestor's arguments to materials from: Schlafly's Eagle Forum, LaHaye's Concerned Women for America, Simond's National Association of Christian Educators, Simond's Citizens for Excellence in Education, and the Gabler's Educational Research Analysts. When he researched further, he also traced the materials to the John Birch Society. The Tactics for Thinking program strives to implement a type of school reform that will promote critical thinking; it would seem that critical thinking is not valued by these fundamentalist groups and that these groups are, indeed, well organized and working together toward common objectives.

It would seem then that these groups do have an agenda, although we are unable to determine exactly their objectives. They are also working together to a certain extent. These qualities make the fundamentalist censor different from the literary censor. Literary censors like E. D. Hirsch write books about what our children should know but they do not go to court to enforce their booklists. William Bennett's list is different from Hirsch's and we see nothing that suggests they are working together toward a standard list. The books written by Bennett and Hirsch do contribute to the current trend in education bashing, but the increased grassroot censorship cases have been led by the people who lived in our small communities. This is where the national fundamentalist organizations are making an impact is at the grassroots level.

Part IV - What Can We Do?

A majority of fundamentalists wanted President Bush to be re-elected. However, now that Bill Clinton has been elected, there are indications that the fundamentalists will return to a grassroots concentration. These groups had hoped that President Bush's America 2000 plan would be implemented and that a voucher system would allow their children to attend the school of choice. They know that Clinton's education plans include no voucher system. Therefore, they need to refocus again at the grassroots level.

If teachers are to effectively ward off these grassroots attacks, three steps should be taken. Many of you in this room have taken proactive steps and many of you work in districts that have taken proactive steps. The first step includes contractual rights agreements that give teachers the right to select and use outside materials that are relevant to their courses and appropriate to the level, ability, and maturity of their students. Books and instructional methods that fit the guidelines set by a school board are

considered appropriate. All of the teachers in the district agree to uniformly adhere to the school board's guidelines. Are the teachers in your district agreeing to such contract provisions?

For teachers there is a big difference between self-censorship and wise selection. The second proactive step that can be taken is the writing of rationales. Writing rationales can help a teacher feel confident about the texts in the classroom. Most people recommend that teachers prepare a rationale for any long work to be taught to an entire class. Some whole language teachers write rationals for any books available within the classroom. Rationales discuss specific literary and pedagogical objectives and how the book will meet the objectives. If a book has the potential of presenting problems, then the rationale should discuss how the teachers will face those problems. Some rationales have been written, for example, the 1983 Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books, edited by Diane Shugert, from the Connecticut Council of Teachers of English is sold by NCTE at this convention. However, all the books you use in your classroom are probably not included in this collection. Ellen, Rita, and I have placed some censored books up here on the table. Any teacher who uses a book that has been involved in a censorship attempt, should write a rationale. Ellen Brinkley has prepared a Rationale form that can be used:

Selection Rationale for Classroom Materials

Title: _____

Author: _____

Publisher: _____

Date published: _____

1. This work will be used . . .

_____ as common text to be read / viewed by whole class

_____ as limited choice to be read / viewed by small group within class

_____ as individual choice as part of thematic unit

_____ as individual free choice

2. Ways in which this work is especially appropriate for the **age** and the **intellectual / emotional / social development** of the students in the context of this class . . .

3. Ways in which this work **engages students' interests and stimulates growth in factual knowledge / literary appreciation / aesthetic values / critical consciousness / ethical development . . .**

4. Ways this work might be controversial / difficult / problematic . . .

5. Ways difficulties might be overcome / problems resolved . . .

6. To note when introducing this work to students . . .

Dr. Ellen H. Brinkley
English Department
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Xeroxs of published reviews from The Horn Book, Library Journal, or other such journals can accompany and augment a rationale. Teachers should be proactive in writing rationales; in this way they are meeting challenges before they arise. How many of you have written rationales? May we see a show of hands.

Like teachers and districts, school boards should also be proactive by writing a clearly defined method of handling all complaints. The existence of a standard procedure discourages many who would otherwise complain. The NCTE Committee's The Students' Right to Read includes a form that can be used by school districts:

Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work

(From NCTE's The Students' Right to Read) Paperback _____

Author _____ Hardcover _____

Title _____

Publisher (If known) _____

Request initiated by _____

Telephone _____ Address _____

City _____ Zip Code _____

Complainant represents

_____ Himself / Herself

_____ (Name organization) _____

_____ (Identify other group) _____

1. Have you been able to discuss this work with the teacher or librarian who ordered it or who used it? _____ Yes _____ No
2. What do you understand to be the general purpose for using this work?
   a. Provide support for a unit in the curriculum _____ Yes _____ No
   b. Provide a learning experience for the reader in one kind of literature? _____ Yes _____ No
   c. Other _____

      _____
3. Did the general purpose for the use of the work, as described by the teacher or librarian, seem a suitable one to you? _____ Yes _____ No

If not, please explain _____

_____

4. What do you think is the general purpose of the author in this book?

_____

_____

5. In what ways do you think a work of this nature is not suitable for the use the teacher or librarian wishes to carry out?

6. Have you been able to learn what is the students' response to this work?

_____ Yes _____ No

7. What response did the students make? _____

_____

8. Have you been able to learn from your school library what book reviewers or other students of literature have written about this book?

_____ Yes _____ No

9. Would you like the teacher or librarian to give you a written summary of of what book reviewers and other students have written about this book or film? _____ Yes _____ No

10. Do you have negative reviews of the book? _____ Yes _____ No

11. Where were they published? _____

12. Would you be willing to provide summaries of the reviews you have collected? _____ Yes _____ No

13. What would you like your library / school to do about this work?

_____ Do not assign / lend it to my child.

_____ Return it to the staff selection committee / department for reevaluation.

_____ Other – Please explain. _____

14. In its place, what work would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of the subject treated? _____

_____

Signature _____ Date _____

Any one who wanted to file a formal complaint would have to begin by filling out such a form. The NCTE form asks those who complain if they read the entire work and if they would cite specific pages and sections to which they object. Usually a broadly based committee consisting of parents, community leaders, and school officials reviews the complaints. How many of you work in districts that have a standardized complaint procedure?

Finally, entire communities can be proactive by keeping lines of communication open. Fundamentalist groups thrive when communication is closed because they have no refutation for their arguments. Robert Simonds, the head of Citizens for Excellence in Education, boasts that his organization has helped to elect 1,965 school board members. In this November's elections, they hoped to elect 3,100 more. It doesn't take a math wizard to figure out that if three CEE members are elected to serve on a school board that consists of five people, the school district is going to have some difficult times. And some school districts have had some real problems. In Xenia, Ohio a state-mandated AIDS curriculum was rejected. In Morton, Illinois the story of Genesis had to be included in science instruction. Two years ago 60 candidates backed by the Christian right were elected in San Diego County. In 1990, 46 San Diego County school board candidates were listed on slates handed out by church groups and 24 of them won.

Simonds advises CEE members who are running for office not to announce their agenda. He knows that few people vote in school board elections. He says: "If only 10,000 vote in your district, that means 100-300 voters could elect the entire new school board."

But communities that are proactive are blocking the inroads walked by members of far right organizations. The Institute for First Amendment Studies out of Great Barrington, Massachusetts has helped to make districts aware of Far Right strategies. In Houston a past president of a local CEE chapter lost his bid for election to the school board. Several lost in elections in the Chicago area. Robert Marzano, one of the authors of Tactics for Thinking, has studied the strategies of the Far Right since Tactics ran into difficulty in some school districts. Marzano advises us to fight back before it's too late and he warns that these groups are powerful. How many of you live in communities that keep communications open?

Larry McMurtry in the Introduction of Liberty Denied states: "It is up to us all who value freedom of expression as the high and indivisible right that it is to put some energy into our vigilance so that we can detect the Stealth bombers of the censors, however low or locally they fly." If there is a grassroots attack on you, your school district, or in your community, will you be ready?